

# Modern times racism essay



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Through the decades of recent, racism has played a very important role in the social and psychological growth and development of children and adolescents. Times have changed and the effects of racism on this particular demographic area have changed drastically. It is difficult to judge if the change has been for the better or worse, but most like to believe it was for the betterment of the world.

Racism will likely never end, but society can change the way it handles the elements of racism and the lasting effects it has. “ For more than four decades, the notion that racism and physical prejudice don’t fully develop in humans until the teen or adult years has been at the root of research into racism” (Burnett III , 2012). It has been discovered that children develop racial prejudices at a much younger age than originally theorized.

New research not yet published by Mahzarin Banaji, a renowned Harvard University psychologist, brain researcher, and racism and physical prejudice expert, and colleagues suggests that even though they may not understand the “ why” of their feelings, children exposed to racism tend to accept and embrace it as young as age 3, and in just a matter of days” (Burnett III , 2012) This is difficult for many people to embrace, but the question is what, if any, lasting effect do these racial notions have upon the young child or adolescent? It is easy to come to the conclusion that racism can have a disparaging effect on children and adolescents.

These results can range from criminal behavior, aggression, depression, and more fatal outcomes such as suicide. “ Children who experience discrimination are more susceptible to becoming depressed, new studies

suggest” (Oliver & Grohol Psy. D. , 2010). This psychosocial stressor has created depression and lowered self-esteem among each age group, and these results can lead to unsuccessful stressors for minorities. Racist incidents lead to changes of world perspective and can create racist feelings toward the race that caused the racial incidents the child or teen experienced.

Many racial slurs, jokes, and reactions are learned through interaction with peers, family, and other adults in the child’s life. Although this is not understood fully until later, the children begin mimicking the actions and words of those that influence their day to day interactions. The Many Costs of Racism is a vivid account of the mental, physical health and economic effects of everyday racism for Black Americans and of racism’s high costs for all Americans. This book portrays the incidents that create racial tension in society today, and the author depicts reasoning for racism through the theory that it is a learned behavior.

In past decades, the effect of racism was much stronger and longer lasting. Baby boomers and earlier born members of society distinctly remember being told not to fraternize with one ethnic group or another, and they were also taught to be racially charged to the extent of ostracizing, bullying, and causing general trouble for the minority ethnic groups. It was also not unheard of to hear a recount or two from this age group of participating in the beating or hanging of a minority due to the intense racial tension at the time.

Time has merely changed the intensity of the racial tension, but it has done nothing for the effects the children feel and the the emotions they bury in regards to racism. “ In the historic decision of May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, unanimously concluded ‘ that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘ separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Clark, 1963, p. XV). This decision made it illegal to force blacks to attend separate educational facilities.

This produced a fairer education system, but on the other hand, it created much more intense racial discrimination among children and teens. The children who suffered this movement, so to speak, were tortured verbally and physically as well. These experiences suffered by the minority children were the end result of learned behaviors that the white children had learned from their community influences such as family, peers, and other authoritative adults. “ There is evidence that racial discrimination increases the odds that adolescents and adults will develop mental health problems” (Elias, 2009).

This evidence is presented through high quality studies of children as they age into adults. Furthermore, this evidence points directly to the fact that children who have racially driven experiences such as discrimination or intimidation tend to be more vulnerable to long term traumatic effects which include mental disorders, behavioral disorders, etc. “ Perceptions of racism was shown to be associated with internalizing and externalizing behaviors, anger, conduct problems, and delinquent behaviors in adolescents” (Pachter DO & Coll PhD, 2009).

Pachter and Coll went on to also discuss the fact that these same children and adolescents were prone to depressive and anxiety disorders as well as other mental disorders. These children were also reported to abuse tobacco, alcohol, and recreational drugs. This is theoretically linked to their gained low self-esteem and self-worth issues. “ It’s kind of like the elephant in the corner of the room. It’s there, but nobody really talks about it. And it may have significant mental and physical health consequences in these children’s lives. ” (n/a, 2010).

In many American homes racism is not discussed as a topic but instead as a way of life. Many white children are taught from a very young age, sometimes inadvertently and sometimes purposefully, that minority children are inferior, lazy, worthless, and racial slurs. This teaching can sometimes be simply through the child’s mimicry of the adult’s words or actions, but more often than not the child is simply acting as the parents have taught them. Black children are also taught reverse racism through racial slurs and distrust of white counterparts or other races.

This dual racism affects children and adolescents in the most extreme of ways. So many children suffer from mental disorders that later manifest into physical health ailments due to racism and learned hatred. The previous decades of racism were much harsher on a child or adolescent than the current times. Today’s society is more accepting of racial differences, especially in urban areas. On the other hand, many suburban and rural areas still have an abundance of racist people teaching their children and later generations to hate for no other reason than their own parents taught them this was the right thing to do.

Coming from a family of racists is a tough cycle to break. Many children can be ostracized or simply disowned from their family for associating or even entering a relationship with someone of another race. This pain also leaves a nasty scar on an adolescent's mental health. In previous generations many white children and adolescents were forbidden to socialize or fraternize with those of African American descent because they were considered inferior and stupid, but in the current world people of all races socialize, fraternize, marry, attend school together, etc.

Ethnic diversity has become a major training point in many business organizations. Therefore, a person would think that racism is not a problem in America, but it is a very large problem that people do not openly address enough. Racism is also not something that only Africans, Asians, or Hispanic Americans have to contend with. White children face racism too in the urban predominantly black neighborhoods. Racism began as a predominantly black problem. In modern times racism can touch any race in any neighborhood because of the breeding of ignorance.

Racism has affected children for centuries, but now it has become a much more pressing issue because studies are revealing the long term effects on children as a result of racism. Children who are told continually that they are inferior or worthless tend to believe it after a certain period of time, and this belief creates a self-esteem issue leading to depression and many other mental health disorders linked to the original racist experiences of a child or adolescent. Very few ideals are as easy to learn and as difficult to forget as the learning of racial perceptions.

Children do not simply learn race from their parents, but instead they take all of the community's perceptions and build a patchwork, so to speak, regarding their own beliefs on race. Many children take the predominant ideals from their community and simply accept them as an absolute truth. For example, a child may live in a predominantly white neighborhood with very few minority children. This community may be intensely racist. Therefore, the child takes these obvious ideals from their peers, teachers, family, and other community members and simply inherits these negative ideas about minorities.

Now on the other hand, the minority child initiates the idea that they are inferior, unacceptable, and not welcome. This initiation of these ideals merely aids in the destruction of the child's mental state. " Current psychological research suggests this approach is all wrong. In fact, research clearly shows that children not only recognize race from a very young age, but also develop racial biases by ages three to five that do not necessarily resemble the racial attitudes of adults in their lives" (Winkler PhD, 2009).

It seems that children form biases simply because their lack of cognitive abilities. Many younger children categorize people in broad areas. For example a child that sees a person of another race acting mean they make the generalization that all people of that race are mean. This changes as children grow older and are exposed to diversity and the community beliefs of their particular community and their parents as well. At later ages children begin to adopt the norm of their particular group of elders and other community members.

It is clear that children gather their beliefs and feelings regarding race from the normal for their area of dwelling, but at a young age they make generalizations for their own personal benefit. These generalizations are broad and typically change over time, but racial tendencies grow ultimately from the influence of others as well as their own personal feelings. It is also difficult to curb racism when it is required on a biracial child's birth certificate to choose one race or another.

This can be confusing for the child if ever exposed to the idea that their birth certificate says they are black yet they could pass for a white child. This is the case with many other mixed race children. With this difficulty facing the child, the child is likely to choose to be biased toward the race they choose. Not only will this child face the anger of children against their race or the misunderstanding of why the child has parents of two different races. Children facing racism endure teasing, anger, and even violence. These things lead to many different health problems for the child.

The teasing leads into a lowered self-esteem and even self-worth issues because the child begins to feel as if they aren't as good as others or that they are inferior simply because of their skin color. The anger and violence can be physically damaging to a child but can also lead to depression and extreme anxiety for the child because of the stress of being teased, physically assaulted, and bearing the brunt of someone's anger because of the color of their skin. It is not necessarily only black or Hispanic children who undergo the damaging effects of racism from other children and adults.



It is certainly geographically dependent. If a white child attends a school in a predominantly black or Hispanic neighborhood, they may be ostracized intensely because of their white race. The opposite can be true for a black or Hispanic child being reared in a large white geographic region. In the past, the parents and grandparents of these children facing racism today experienced a much harsher reality. They lived in a time when racism was a way of life. It was considered the community norm to hate, for lack of a better word, the black Americans.

It was also very prevalent in that era to mistreat the black Americans in any way. Furthermore, it was not unheard of for Hispanic Americans to be mistreated or mistrusted as well, but it is more prevalent in today's society because of the border control issues the nation faces. Middle Eastern Americans are also the subject of intense dislike post 9-11. The true question is whether there really is a way to avoid the gloomy futures that racism creates. The answer to that question is yes, but it will take the world's entire effort to beat this nasty attitude.

A young child with a strong, supportive family and social group do not necessarily go on to face depression, anxiety, and other health dangers related to racism. The reality is that many people retaliate against racism with violence or anger in return, and these things only escalate the situation to a much higher level. Although racial tensions are not as high as they once were, children are still exposed to the rearing of racism's ugly head. "White children are also dehumanized and damaged intellectually by racism" (Derman-Sparks, Higa, & Sparks).

It is easy to see that many parents project their racial beliefs on their children, but it is also true that they ensure their children are politically correct to avoid any discord in public if their child were to say the wrong thing. This teaching is absolutely incorrect because children will still say things to classmates that are hurtful racially or even lash out at those of a different race. It is wise to educate children on the different races and the proper names for them prior to their ability to pick up on labels that others use for the different races. Children will “naturally” grow up to be non-racist adults only when they live in a non-racist society. Until then, adults must guide children’s antiracist development” (Derman-Sparks, Higa, & Sparks). This is fostered through accurate knowledge and pride about one’s racial/cultural identity, accurate knowledge and appreciation of other racial groups, and an understanding of how racism works and how to combat it.

The future of the effect of racism will depend on those that guide and lead our young people today. Today, perhaps more than ever, America is a nation of racial and ethnic diversity. For example, the 1980s and 1990s saw a huge increase in the number of Hispanics and Asians who immigrated to the United States and changed the complexion of our society” (Rhodes, Ph. D. , Saunders MSW, & Saunders, 2005). This goes to show that the world around us is ever changing and we as a nation must adapt and overcome our prejudices. During the time of slavery, many white Americans considered Africa the “dark continent” inhabited by savages who needed rescued from their wicked ways by Christians.

This is obviously a myth, but many people believed this just as many people today believe that those people of Middle Eastern descent are terrorists or

radicals of some form. This too is obviously a myth but racism can affect any race at any time. We may not have the tragic results our ancestors did, but racism still leaves its mark on our youth today. Racism can be devastating to our youth, and yet we continue to perpetuate its use in society to display an anger that originates from falsities.

Racism creates ruinous results among our youth causing mental disorders among them that can manifest into physical disorders or even intense mental disruptions. Racism leads our youth to commit atrocities that under any other conditions would never even be thought of. The depression and anxiety felt within these children is heart-rending. It can break a person's heart to see the pain a child feels at being shouted racial slurs and being treated poorly by peers, adults, and other members of society. A friend of mine has experienced racism against her child because he is a biracial child.

She is white and her husband is black. The other children have made fun of him because he isn't dark skinned as their ideal of a black person is, and he isn't white like his mother. It is devastating to watch him cry because he doesn't understand what is wrong with him that children make fun of him and treat him differently than their peers. He really doesn't fit into any group because the black children call him white, and the white children call him black. Therefore, it is a reality that these youth can and will understand racial biases at a very young age because her son is only 3 years old.

It is also a mental burden on his mother because she stresses over her child not fitting in and feeling alienated. Also, many of my white, black, and Hispanic peers have stated that at one time or another they have felt things

were done or said to them because of racial differences. It is rather unheard of to hear a white person claim someone has been racially biased towards them, but do not be fooled this type of racism does exist. It is imperative that the nation work to find an even ground where race becomes a background to the more important identifiers for people.

Teaching children that race is just as important as other factors simply perpetuates the racial tensions and prejudices within this nation. It is easy to see that children are delicate and fragile in mind and body. It is important to remember that just as sexual abuse deeply affects a child's mind and mental state racism is not very much different. This is true because the traumatic incidents of racism can leave mental scars on a child for a lifetime. Parents can help bring about the change needed to gear children towards a diverse positivity.